

RoseLee Goldberg

PERFORMANCE ART

From Futurism to the Present

Revised and enlarged edition

**The Art of Ideas and the Media Generation
1968 to 1986**

Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York

For Pauline and Allan

1 *Title page: Schlemmer, *Slat Dance*, 1927. The figure, performing in semi-darkness, outlined the geometrical division of the space and emphasized the perspective view for the audience*

The author wishes to thank all those who have contributed to the preparation of the material, especially the artists, Mel Gordon, John Golding, Lillian Kiesler, Andreas and Eva Weininger, and Tony Stokes. Special thanks also to Dakota Jackson for his untiring support and patience.

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The Art of Ideas and the Media Generation 1968 to 1986

The Art of Ideas

The year 1968 prematurely marked the beginning of the decade of the seventies. In that year political events severely unsettled cultural and social life throughout Europe and the United States. The mood was one of irritation and anger with prevailing values and structures. While students and workers shouted slogans and erected street barricades in protest against 'the establishment', many younger artists approached the institution of art with equal, if less violent, disdain. They questioned the accepted premises of art and attempted to re-define its meaning and function. Moreover, artists took it upon themselves to express these new directions in lengthy texts, rather than leave that responsibility to the traditional mediator, the art critic. The gallery was attacked as an institution of commercialism and other outlets sought for communicating ideas to the public. On a personal level, it was a time when each artist re-evaluated his or her own intentions for making art, and when each action was to be seen as part of an overall investigation of art processes and not, paradoxically, as an appeal for popular acceptance.

The art object came to be considered entirely superfluous within this aesthetic and the notion of 'conceptual art' was formulated as 'an art of which the material is concepts'. Disregard for the art object was linked to its being seen as a mere pawn in the art market: if the function of the art object was to be an economic one, the argument went, then conceptual work could have no such use. Although economic necessities made this a short-lived dream, performance – in this context – became an extension of such an idea: although visible, it was intangible, it left no traces and it could not be bought and sold. Finally, performance was seen as reducing the element of alienation between performer and viewer – something that fitted well into the often leftist inspiration of the investigation of the function of art – since both audience and performer experienced the work simultaneously.

Performance in the last two years of the sixties and of the early seventies reflected conceptual art's rejection of traditional materials of canvas, brush or chisel, with performers turning to their own bodies as art material, just as Klein and Manzoni had done some years previously. For conceptual art

implied the *experience* of time, space and material rather than their representation in the form of objects, and the body became the most direct medium of expression. Performance was therefore an ideal means to materialize art concepts and as such was the practice corresponding to many of those theories. For example, ideas on space could just as well be interpreted in actual space as in the conventional two-dimensional format of the painted canvas; time could be suggested in the duration of a performance or with the aid of video monitors and video feedback. Sensibilities attributed to sculpture – such as the texture of material or objects in space – became even more tangible in live presentation. This translation of concepts into live works resulted in many performances which often appeared quite abstract to the viewer since there was seldom an attempt to create an overall visual impression or to provide clues to the work through the use of objects or narrative. Rather the viewer could, by association, gain insight into the particular experience that the performer demonstrated.

The demonstrations which concentrated on the artist's body as material came to be known as 'body art'. However, this term was a loose one, allowing for a wide variety of interpretation. While some body artists used their own persons as art material, others positioned themselves against walls, in corners, or in open fields, making human sculptural forms in space. Others constructed spaces in which both they and the viewer's sensation of space would be determined by the particular environment. Performers who had pioneered the so-called 'new dance' several years earlier, refined their movements to precise configurations developing a vocabulary of movements for the body in space.

Some artists, dissatisfied with the somewhat materialist exploration of the body, assumed poses and wore costumes (in performance and also in everyday life), creating 'living sculpture'. This concentration on the personality and appearance of the artist led directly to a large body of work which came to be called 'autobiographical', since the content of these performances used aspects of the performer's personal history. Such a reconstruction of private memory had its complement in the work of many performers who turned to 'collective memory' – the study of rituals and ceremonies – for the sources of their work: pagan, Christian or American-Indian rites often suggested the format of live events. A further clue to the style and content of many performances was the original discipline of many artists, whether in poetry, music, dance, painting, sculpture or theatre.

Yet another performance strategy relied on the presence of the artist in public as interlocutor, as earlier in Beuys's question and answer sessions. Some artists gave instructions to the viewer, suggesting that they enact the performances themselves. Above all, audiences were provoked into asking just what were the boundaries of art: where, for instance, did scientific or

philosophical enquiry end and art begin, or what distinguished the fine line between art and life?

Four years of conceptual art, from about 1968 on, had an enormous effect on an even younger generation of artists emerging from art schools where conceptual artists were teaching. By 1972 the fundamental questions raised had to some extent been absorbed in the new work. But the enthusiasm for social change and emancipation – students', women's, children's – had been considerably dampened. World monetary and energy crises subtly altered both life styles and preoccupations. The institution of the gallery, once rejected for its exploitation of artists, was reinstated as a convenient outlet. Not surprisingly, performance reflected these new attitudes. Partly in response to the cerebral issues of conceptual art, partly in response to the extraordinary productions of pop concerts – from the Rolling Stones to The Who, from Roxy Music to Alice Cooper – the new performance became stylish, flamboyant, and entertaining.

The performances that resulted from this period of intensive enquiry were numerous. They covered a wide range of materials, sensitivities and intentions, which crossed all disciplinary boundaries. Yet even so, it was possible to characterize various kinds of work. While a grouping of these trends may appear arbitrary, it nevertheless serves as a necessary key to comprehending performance of the seventies.

Instructions and questions

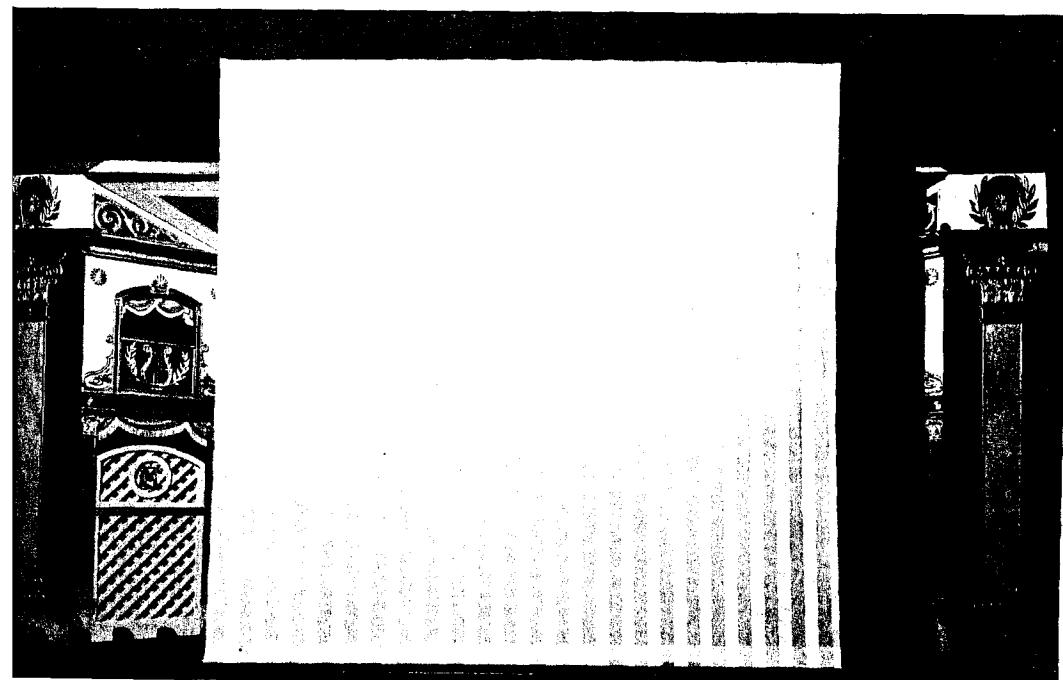
Some early conceptual 'actions' were more written instructions than actual performance, a set of proposals which the reader could perform or not, at will. For instance, Yoko Ono, in her contribution to the exhibition 'Information' at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in the summer of 1970, instructed the reader to 'draw an imaginary map... go walking on an actual street according to the map...'; the Dutch artist Stanley Brouwn suggested that visitors to the exhibition 'Prospect 1969' 'walk during a few moments very consciously in a certain direction...'. In each case those who followed the instructions would supposedly experience the city or countryside with an enhanced consciousness. It was after all with just such a heightened awareness that artists had painted canvases of their surroundings; rather than passively viewing a finished artwork, the observer was now persuaded to see the environment as though through the eyes of the artist.

Some artists saw performance as a means to explore the interrelationship between museum and gallery architecture and the art exhibited in them. The French artist Daniel Buren, for instance – who had done striped paintings since 1966 – began to paste stripes on a curved ceiling to emphasize the architecture of the building rather than submit to its overwhelming presence.

He also suggested in several performances that a work of art could be free of architecture altogether. *Dans les rues de Paris* (1968) consisted of men wearing sandwich boards painted with stripes, walking through the streets of Paris, while *Manifestation III* at the Théâtre des Arts Décoratifs in Paris (1967) consisted of a forty-minute play. The audience found on arrival at the theatre that the only 'dramatic action' was a stage curtain of stripes. Such works were intended to change the viewers' perception of the museum landscape as much as the urban one, and to provoke them to question the *situations* in which they normally viewed art.¹²⁵

The American artist James Lee Byars attempted to change the perception of viewers by confronting them individually in a question and answer exchange. The questions were often paradoxical and obscure and, depending on the endurance of the selected individual, could go on for any length of time. He even set up a World Question Center at the Los Angeles County Museum as part of the 'Art and Technology' exhibition (1969). The French artist Bernar Venet posed questions by implication and proxy: he invited specialists in mathematics or physics to deliver lectures on their subjects to art audiences. *Relativity Track* (1968) at the Judson Memorial Church in New York consisted of four simultaneous lectures by three physicists on relativity and one medical doctor on the larynx. Such demonstrations suggested that 'art' was not necessarily *about* art only, while at the same time they introduced audiences to current questions in other disciplines.

125 David Buren, detail from *Act 3*, New York City, 1973



The artist's body

This attempt to translate the essential elements of one discipline into another characterized the early work of the New York artist Vito Acconci. Around 1969, Acconci used his body to provide an alternative 'ground' to the 'page ground' he had used as a poet; it was a way, he said, of shifting the focus from words to himself as an 'image'. So instead of writing a poem about 'following', Acconci acted out *Following Piece* as part of 'Street Works IV' (1969). The piece consisted simply of Acconci following randomly chosen individuals in the street, abandoning them once they left the street to enter a building. It was invisible in that people were unaware that it was going on; Acconci made several other pieces which were equally private. Though introspective, they were also the work of an artist looking at himself as an image, seeing 'the artist' as others might see him: Acconci saw himself 'as a marginal presence . . . tying in to ongoing situations . . .'. Each work dealt with a new image: for example, in *Conversion* (1970), he attempted to conceal his masculinity by burning his body hair, pulling at each breast – 'in a futile attempt to produce female breasts' – and hid his penis between his legs. But such private activities only underlined even more emphatically the self-contradictory character of his attitude; for whatever discoveries he made in this process of self-searching, he had no way of 'publishing' them as one would a poem. It became necessary, therefore, for him to make this 'body poetry' more public.

The first public works were equally introspective and poetic. For example, *Telling Secrets* (1971) took place in a dark deserted shed on the Hudson River in the early hours of the cold winter morning. From 1 to 2 am, Acconci whispered secrets – 'which could have been totally detrimental to me if publically revealed' – to the late night visitors. Again this work could be read as the equivalent of a poet jotting down private thoughts which once released for publication could be detrimental in certain contexts.

The implication of others in his subsequent performances led Acconci to the notion of 'power-fields' as described by the psychologist Kurt Lewin in *The Principle of Topological Psychology*. In that work, Acconci found a description of how each individual radiated a personal power-field which included all possible interaction with other people and objects in a particular physical space. His works from 1971 dealt with this power-field between himself and others in specially constructed spaces: he was concerned with 'setting up a field in which the audience was, so that they became a part of what I was doing . . . they became part of the physical space in which I moved'. *Seedbed* (1971), performed at the Sonnabend Gallery, New York, became the most notorious of these works. In it Acconci masturbated under a ramp built into the gallery over which the visitors walked.

These works led Acconci to a further interpretation of the power-field, designing a space which suggested his personal presence. These 'potential performances' were just as important as actual performances. Finally Acconci withdrew from performance altogether: *Command Performance* (1974) consisted of an empty space, an empty chair and a video monitor, the soundtrack inviting the viewer to create his or her own performance.

While many of Acconci's performances suggested his background in poetry, those of Dennis Oppenheim showed traces of his training as a sculptor in California. Like many artists of the time, he wished to counteract the overwhelming influence of minimalist sculpture. According to Oppenheim, body art became 'a calculated, malicious and strategic ploy' against the minimalists' preoccupation with the essence of the object. It was a means to focus on the 'objectifier' – the maker – rather than on the object itself. So Oppenheim made several works in which the prime concern was the *experience* of sculptural forms and activities, rather than their actual construction. In *Parallel Stress* (1970) he constructed a large mound of earth ¹²⁶ that would act as a model for his own demonstration. Then he hung himself from parallel brick walls – holding onto the walls with his hands and feet – creating a body curve which echoed the shape of the mound.

126 Dennis Oppenheim, *Parallel Stress*, 1970



Lead Sink for Sebastian (1970) was designed for a man who had one artificial leg, the intention being similarly to act out certain sculptural sensations, such as smelting and reduction. The artificial leg was replaced by a lead pipe which was then melted by a blowtorch, causing the man's body to tilt unevenly as the 'sculpture' was liquidized. In that same year, Oppenheim took these experiments further in a work which he executed on Jones Beach, Long Island. In *Reading Position for a Second Degree Burn* he was concerned with the notion of colour change, 'a traditional painter's concern', but in this case his own skin became 'pigment': lying on the beach, a large book covering his bare chest, Oppenheim remained until the sun had burnt the area exposed to it, effecting a 'colour change' by the simplest means.

Oppenheim believed that body art was limitless in its application. It was both a conductor of 'energy and experience' and a didactic instrument for explaining the sensations that go into making artwork. Considered in this way, it also represented a refusal to sublimate creative energy into producing objects. By 1972, like many body artists involved in similar introspective and often physically dangerous explorations, he tired of live performance. Just as Acconci had done with his power-fields, Oppenheim devised works which suggested performance but which often used puppets rather than human performers. The little wooden figures, accompanied by recorded songs and phrases, continued to ask the fundamental questions raised by conceptual art; what were the roots of art, what were the motives for making art, and what lay behind seemingly autonomous artistic decisions? One example was 127 *Theme for a Major Hit* (1975) where, in a dimly lit room, a lonely puppet jerked endlessly to its own theme song.

127 Oppenheim, *Theme for a Major Hit*, 1975

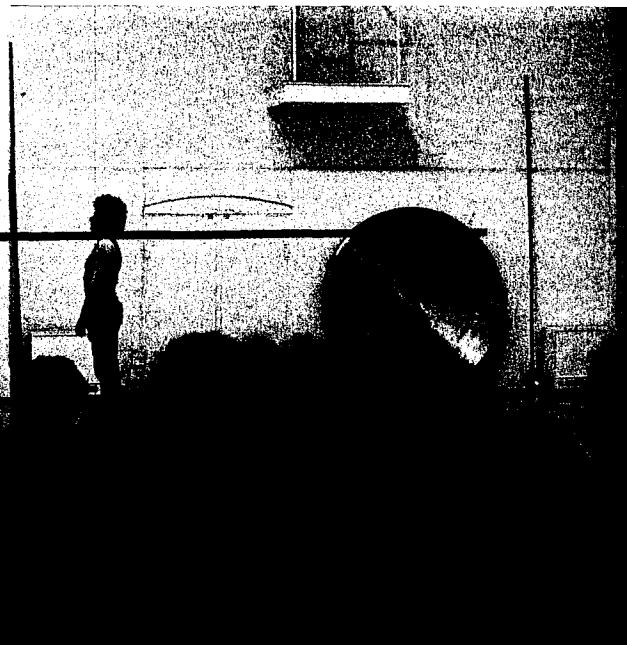


The Californian artist Chris Burden went through a similar transition to that of Acconci and Oppenheim, beginning with performances that carried physical exertion and concentration beyond the bounds of normal endurance, and withdrawing from performance after several years of death-defying acts. His first performance took place while he was still a student, in the students' locker-room at the University of California, Irvine, in 1971. Burden installed himself in a $2' \times 2' \times 3'$ locker for five days, his only supplies for this tight-fitting stay being a large bottle of water, the contents of which were piped to him via the locker above. In the same year, in Venice, California, he asked a friend to shoot him in the left arm, in a work entitled *Shooting Piece*. The bullet, fired from fifteen feet away, should have grazed his arm, but instead blew away a large piece of flesh.

Deadman of the following year was another all-too-serious game with death. He lay wrapped in a canvas bag in the middle of a busy Los Angeles boulevard. Luckily he was unhurt, and the police put an end to this work by arresting him for causing a false emergency to be reported. Similarly death-defying acts were repeated at regular intervals; each could have ended in Burden's death, but the calculated risk involved was, he said, an energizing factor. Burden's painful exercises were meant to transcend physical reality: they were also a means to 're-enact certain American classics – like shooting people'. Presented in semi-controlled conditions he hoped that they would alter people's perception of violence. Certainly such danger had been portrayed on canvas or simulated in theatre scenes; Burden's performances, involving real danger, had a grandiose aim: to alter the history of representation of such themes for all time.

The body in space

At the same time that artists were working on their bodies as objects, manipulating them as they would a piece of sculpture or a page of poetry, others developed more structured performances which explored the body as an element in space. For example, the Californian artist Bruce Nauman executed works such as *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square* (1968), which had a direct relationship to his sculpture. By walking round the square, he could experience at first hand the volume and dimensions of his sculptural works which also dealt with volume and the placement of objects in space. The German artist Klaus Rinke methodically translated the three-dimensional properties of sculpture into actual space in a series of *Primary Demonstrations* begun in 1970. These were 'static sculptures' 128 created with his partner Monika Baumgartl: together they made geometric configurations, moving slowly from one position to the next, usually for several hours at a time. A wall-clock contrasted normal time with the time it

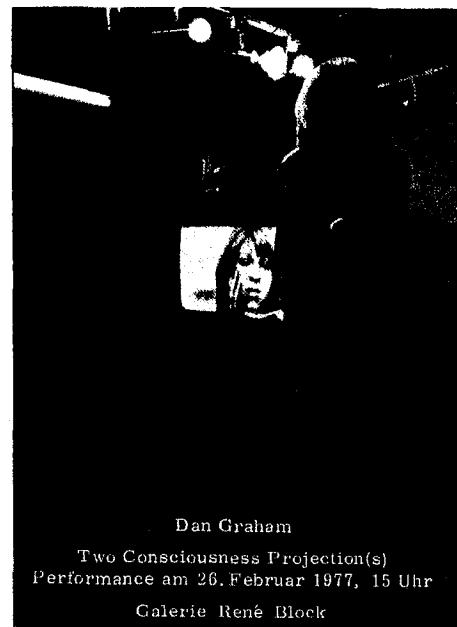


128 Klaus Rinke, *Primary Demonstration: Horizontal-Vertical*, performed at the Oxford Museum of Modern Art, 1976

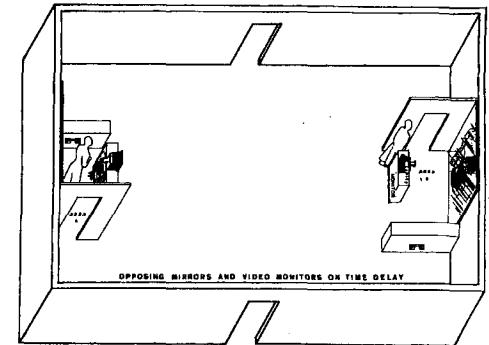
took to make each sculptural shape. According to Rinke, these works contained the same theoretical premises as stone sculpture in space, but the additional elements of time and movement altered the viewer's understanding of those premises: they could actually see the *process* of making sculpture. Rinke hoped that these didactic demonstrations would change the viewer's perception of their own physical reality.

Similarly, the Hamburg artist Franz Erhard Walther was concerned with increasing the viewer's awareness of spatial relationships within real space and real time. In Walther's demonstrations, the viewer would, through a series of rehearsals, become the recipient of the action. For instance, *Going On* (1967) was a typical collaborative work, consisting of a line of twenty-eight pockets of equal size sewn into long lengths of fabric laid out in a field. Four participants climbed into four pockets and by the end of the work had climbed in and out of all the pockets, changing the original configuration of the fabric through their actions. Each of Walther's works provided a means for the spectators to experience the sculptural object themselves, as well as to initiate the unfolding design. Their active role in influencing the shape and procedure of the sculptures was an important element of the work.

The study of active and passive conduct of the viewer became the basis of many of the New York artist Dan Graham's performances from the early seventies. However, Graham wished to combine the role of active performer



Dan Graham
Two Consciousness Projection(s)
Performance am 26. Februar 1977, 15 Uhr
Galerie René Block



D 3 9 5 6 7 8 9 4 1 12 13 14 15 16 17
TKISHA 20 19 18 17 1 21 2 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 22 23 1 19 27
BROWN 2 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 22 23 1 19 27
WAS 2 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 22 23 1 19 27

129 Dan Graham, *Two Consciousness Projection(s)*, invitation card to event presented in February 1977 at the Galerie René Block. Photo from a performance in 1974 with Suzanne Brenner, at the Lisson Gallery, London

130 Graham, diagram for *Opposing Mirrors and Video Monitors on Time Delay*, 1974

131 Trisha Brown, notation used in preparing *Locus*, 1975

132 Brown, *Locus*, 1975



and passive spectator in one and the same person. So he introduced mirrors and video equipment which would allow performers to be the spectators of their own actions. This self-scrutiny was intended to set up a heightened consciousness of every gesture. In *Two Consciousness Projection* (1973) 129 Graham created a situation which would increase that consciousness even further, since two people were asked to verbalize (in front of an audience) how they viewed one of the partners. A woman sat in front of a video screen which showed her face, while a man looked through the video camera trained on her face. As she examined her features and described what she saw, the man, at the same time, related how he read her face. In this way, both the man and woman were active in that they were creating the performance, but they were also passive spectators in that they were watching themselves performing.

Graham's theory of audience–performer relationships was based on Bertold Brecht's idea of imposing an uncomfortable and self-conscious state on the audience in an attempt to reduce the gap between the two. In 130 subsequent works Graham explored this further, adding the elements of time and space. Video techniques and mirrors were used to create a sense of past, present and future, within one constructed space. In a work such as *Present Continuous Past* (1974), the mirror acted as a reflection of present time, while video feedback showed the performer/spectator (in this case the public) their past actions. According to Graham, 'mirrors reflect instantaneous time without duration . . . whereas video feedback does just the opposite, it relates the two in a kind of durational time flow'. So on entering the constructed cube lined with mirrors, the viewers saw themselves first in the mirror and then, eight seconds later, saw those mirrored actions relayed on the video. 'Present time' was the viewer's immediate action, which was then picked up by the mirror and video in rotation. The viewers therefore would see before them what they had recently performed but also knew that any further actions would appear on the video as 'future time'.

The New York performer Trisha Brown added a further dimension to the viewer's notion of the body in space. Works such as *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1969), or *Walking on the Wall* (1970), were designed to disorient the audience's sense of gravitational balance. The first consisted of a man, strapped in mountaineering harness, walking down the vertical wall-face of a seven-story building in lower Manhattan. The second work, using the same mechanical support, took place in a gallery at the Whitney Museum, where performers moved along the wall at right angles to the audience. Similar works explored movement possibilities in space, while 131, 132 *Locus* (1975) related the actual movements in space to a two-dimensional plan. The performance was devised entirely through drawings, and Brown worked on three methods of notation simultaneously to achieve the final

effect: first she drew a cube, then she wrote out a number sequence based on her name which was then matched with the intersecting lines of the cube. She and three dancers choreographed a work determined by the finished drawing.

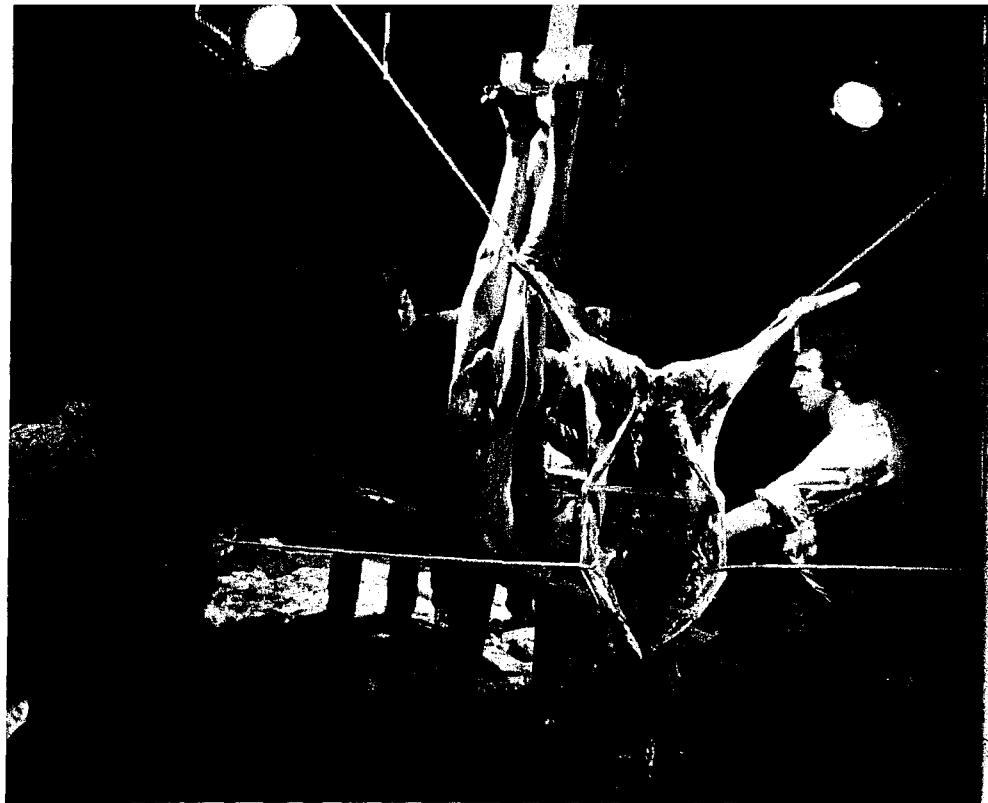
Also in New York, Lucinda Childs created several performances according to carefully worked out notation. *Congeries on Edges for 20 Obliques* (1975) was one such work where five dancers travelled on sets of diagonals across the space, exploring throughout the dance the various combinations indicated in the drawing. Similarly, Laura Dean and her colleagues followed precise 'phrasing patterns' indicated on the score, as in *Circle Dance* (1972).

The influence of American new dance exponents was felt in England where the Ting Theatre of Mistakes set up a collaborative workshop in 1974 to continue the earlier experiments. They put together the various notions developed by American dance pioneers from the fifties and sixties in a handbook, *The Elements of Performance Art*, published in 1976. One of the few such explicit texts on the theory and practice of performance, the book outlined a series of exercises for potential performers. *A Waterfall* (1977), presented on the forecourt and one of the terraces of the Hayward Gallery in London, illustrated some of the notions expressed in the book, such as task-oriented actions, theatre in the round, or the use of objects as spatial and temporal indicators. This particular work developed from the company's interest in structuring performances according to so-called 'additive methods'. With performers positioned at various levels on a large scaffolding, and holding containers, water was conveyed up and then down again, creating a series of 'waterfalls' each one hour long.

Ritual

In contrast to performances which dealt with formal properties of the body in space and time, others were far more emotive and expressionistic in nature. Those of the Austrian artist Hermann Nitsch, beginning in 1962, involving ritual and blood, were described as 'an aesthetic way of praying'. Ancient Dionysian and Christian rites were re-enacted in a modern context, supposedly illustrating Aristotle's notion of catharsis through fear, terror and compassion. Nitsch saw these ritualistic orgies as an extension of action painting, recalling the Futurist Carrà's suggestion: you must paint, as drunkards sing and vomit, sounds, noises and smells.

His *Orgies, Mysteries, Theatre* projects were repeated at regular intervals 133 throughout the seventies. A typical action lasted several hours: it would begin with the sound of loud music – 'the ecstasy created by the loudest possible created noise' – followed by Nitsch giving orders for the ceremony to begin. A slaughtered lamb would be brought on stage by assistants, fastened head



133 Hermann Nitsch, *(Aktion) 48th Action*, presented at the Munich Modernes Theater, 1974

down as if crucified. Then the animal would be disembowelled; entrails and buckets of blood were poured over a nude woman or man, while the drained animal was strung up over their heads. Such activities sprang from Nitsch's belief that humankind's aggressive instincts had been repressed and muted through the media. Even the ritual of killing animals, so natural to primitive man, had been removed from modern-day experience. These ritualized acts were a means of releasing that repressed energy as well as an act of purification and redemption through suffering.

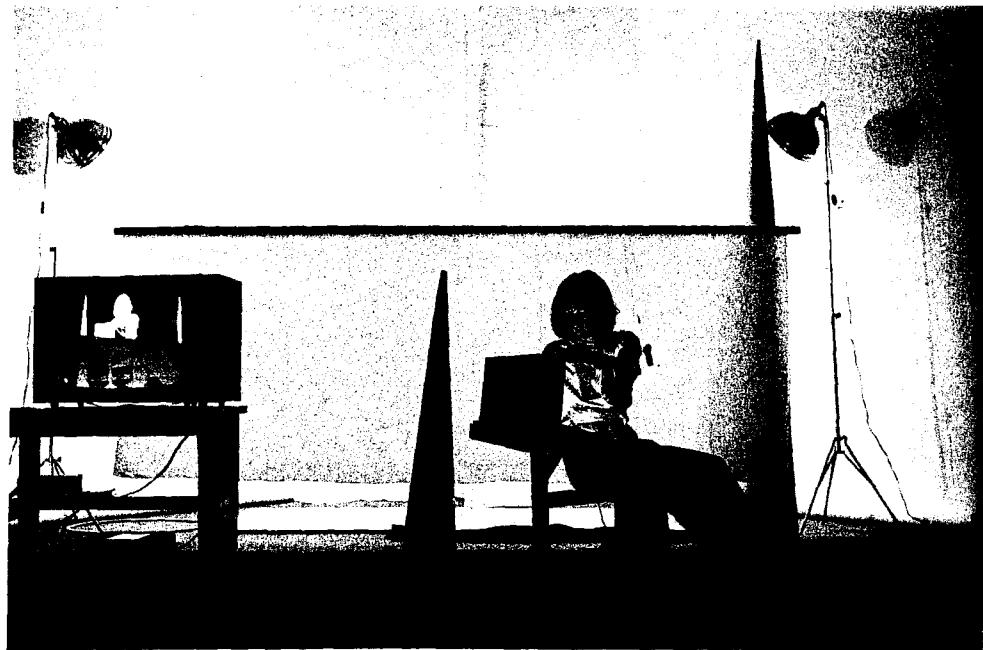
Viennese 'actionism', according to another ritualistic performer, Otto Mühl, was 'not only a form of art, but above all an existential attitude', a description appropriate to the works of Günter Brus, Arnulf Rainer, and Valie Export. Common to these actions was the artist's dramatic self-expression, the intensity of which was reminiscent of Viennese Expressionist painters of fifty years earlier. Not surprisingly, another characteristic of Viennese action artists was their interest in psychology; the studies of Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Reich led to performances dealing specifically with art as therapy. Arnulf Rainer, for example, recreated the gestures of

the mentally insane. In Innsbruck, Rudolf Schwartzkogler created what he called 'artistic nudes – similar to a wreckage'; but his wreckage-like self-mutilations ultimately led to his death in 1969.

In Paris, Gina Pane's self-inflicted cuts to her back, face and hands were no less dangerous. Like Nitsch, she believed that ritualized pain had a purifying effect: such work was necessary 'in order to reach an anaesthetized society'. Using blood, fire, milk and the recreation of pain as the 'elements' of her performances, she succeeded – in her own terms – 'in making the public understand right off that my body is my artistic material'. A typical work, *The Conditioning* (part 1 of 'Auto-Portrait(s)', 1972), consisted of Pane lying on an iron bed with a few crossbars, below which fifteen long candles burnt.

Similarly seeking to understand the ritualized pain of self-abuse, particularly as it is exhibited by psychologically disturbed patients, and the disconnectedness that occurs between the body and the self, Marina Abramovic in Belgrade created equally harrowing work. In 1974, in a work entitled *Rhythm O*, she permitted a room-full of spectators in a Naples gallery to abuse her at their will for six hours, using instruments of pain and pleasure that had been placed on a table for their convenience. By the third hour, her clothes had been cut from her body with razor blades, her skin slashed; a loaded gun held to her head finally caused a fight between her tormentors, bringing the proceeding to an unnerving halt. This passive aggression between individuals she continued to explore in later works executed with the artist Ulay, who became her collaborator in 1975. Together they explored the pain and endurance of relationships, between themselves, and between themselves and the public. *Imponderabilia* (1977) consisted of their two naked bodies, standing facing each other against the frames of a door; the public was obliged to enter the exhibition space through the small gap left between their bodies. Another work, *Relation in Movement* (1977), consisted of Ulay driving a car for sixteen hours in a small circle, while Marina, also in the car, announced the number of circles over a loudspeaker.

Stuart Brisley's actions in London were equally a response to what he considered to be society's anaesthetization and alienation. *And for Today, Nothing* (1972) took place in a darkened bathroom at Gallery House, London, in a bath filled with black liquid and floating debris where Brisley lay for a period of two weeks. According to Brisley, the work was inspired by his distress over the depoliticization of the individual, which he feared would lead to the decay of both individual and social relationships. Reindeer Werk, the name for a couple of young London performers, were no less concerned by similar feelings: their demonstrations of what they called *Behaviour Land*, at Butler's Wharf in London in 1977, were not unlike the work of Rainer in Vienna, in that they recreated the gestures of social outcasts – the insane, the alcoholic, the bum.



134 Joan Jonas, *Funnel*, 1974, performed at the University of Massachusetts

The choice of ritualistic prototypes led to very different kinds of performances. While the Viennese actions fitted the expressionistic and psychological interests so long considered a Viennese characteristic, the work of some American performers reflected much less well-known sensibilities, those of the American Indians. Joan Jonas's work referred back to the religious ceremonies of the Zuñi and Hopi tribes of the Pacific coast, the area where she grew up. Those ancient rites took place at the foot of hills on which the tribe lived and were conducted by the shamans of the tribe.

In Jonas's New York work *Delay Delay* (1972), the audience was similarly situated at a distance above the performance. From the top of a five-storey loft building, they watched thirteen performers dispersed throughout the empty city lots, which were marked with large signs indicating the numbers of paces away from the loft building. The performers clapped wooden blocks, the echoes of which provided the only physical connection between audience and performers. Jonas incorporated the expansive sense of outdoors, so characteristic of Indian ceremonies, in indoor works using mirrors and video to provide the illusion of deep space. *Funnel* (1974) was viewed simultaneously in reality and in a monitored image. Curtains divided the room into three distinct spatial characters, each containing props – a large paper funnel, two swinging parallel bars and a hoop. Other indoor works such as the earlier *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972) retained the mystic

quality of the outdoor pieces through the use of masks, head-dresses of peacock feathers, and ornaments and costume.

Tina Girouard's performances were also built around costumes and ceremonies inspired by the Mardi Gras festivities (she was born in the American south), and Hopi Indian rites. Combining elements from these ceremonial precedents, Girouard presented *Pinwheel* (1977) at the New Orleans Museum of Art. In this work, several performers marked out a square on the floor of the main entrance of the museum, using the fabric to separate the square into four sections representing animal, vegetable, mineral and other so-called 'personae'. Slowly fabrics and various props were ceremoniously added by the performers, transforming the existing pattern into what the artist considered to be 'a series of archetypal world images'. Girouard intended that the ritualized actions would place the actors in a context 'symbolic of the universe' in the spirit of Indian ceremonies, and by so doing create precedents for modern-day versions.

Living sculpture

Much performance work originating in a conceptual framework was humourless, despite the often paradoxical intentions of the artist. It was in England that the first signs of humour and satire emerged.

In 1969, Gilbert and George were students at St Martin's School of Art in London. Along with other young artists such as Richard Long, Hamish Fulton and John Hilliard, these St Martin's students were eventually to become the focus for English conceptual art. Gilbert and George personified the idea of art; they themselves became art, by declaring themselves 'living sculpture'. Their first 'singing sculpture' *Underneath the Arches*, presented in 1969, consisted of the two artists – faces painted gold, wearing ordinary suits, one carrying a walking stick and the other a glove – moving in a mechanical, puppet-like fashion on a small table for about six minutes to the accompaniment of the Flanagan and Allen song of the same name.

Like Manzoni, the inherent irony of focusing the artwork on their own persons and turning themselves into the art object was at the same time a serious means of manipulating or commenting upon traditional ideas about art. In their written dedication to *Underneath the Arches* ('The most intelligent fascinating serious and beautiful art piece you have ever seen') they outlined 'The Laws of Sculptors': '1. Always be smartly dressed, well groomed relaxed friendly polite and in complete control. 2. Make the world to believe in you and to pay heavily for this privilege. 3. Never worry assess discuss or criticise but remain quiet respectful and calm. 4. The Lord chisels still, so don't leave your bench for long.' For Gilbert and George there was thus no separation whatsoever between their activities as sculptors and their activities



135 Gilbert and George, *Underneath the Arches*, first performed in London, 1969

136 Gilbert and George, *The Red Sculpture*, first performed in Tokyo, 1975

in real life. The stream of poems and statements, such as 'To be with art is all we ask', emphasized this point: printed on parchment-like paper and always carrying their official insignia – a monogram resembling the royal one over their logo 'Art for All' – these statements provide a key to the intentions of their single sculpture which they performed for several years, virtually unchanged, in England, and in America in 1971.

Another early work, *The Meal* (14 May 1969), had similarly embodied their concern to eliminate the separation between life and art. The invitations which had been sent out to a thousand people read: 'Isabella Beeton and Doreen Mariott will cook a meal for the two sculptors, Gilbert and George, and their guest, Mr David Hockney, the painter. Richard West will be their waiter. They will dine in Hellicars' beautiful music room at "Ripley", Sunridge Avenue, Bromley, Kent. One hundred numbered and signed iridescent souvenir tickets are now available at three guineas each. We do hope you are able to be present at this important art occasion.' Richard West

was Lord Snowdon's butler, and Isabella Beeton reportedly a distant relative of the Victorian gastronome, Mrs Beeton, whose sumptuous recipes were used. An elaborate meal was served to the final number of thirty guests, who ate sedately for a period of one hour and twenty minutes. David Hockney, commending Gilbert and George for being 'marvellous surrealists, terribly good', added: 'I think what they are doing is an extension of the idea that anyone can be an artist, that what they say or do can be art. Conceptual art is ahead of its time, widening horizons.'

Subsequent works were similarly based on everyday activities: *Drinking Sculpture* took them through London East End pubs, and picnics on quiet river banks became the subject for their large pastoral drawings and photographic pieces, exhibited in between their slowly developed living sculpture. Their work *The Red Sculpture* (1975), first presented in Tokyo, lasted ninety minutes and was perhaps their most 'abstract', and their last, performance work. Faces and hands painted a brilliant red, the two figures moved into slowly paced poses in intricate relation to command-like statements which were taped and played on a tape recorder.

The seductive appeal of oneself becoming an art object, which resulted in numerous offshoots of living sculpture, was partly the result of the glamour of the rock world of the sixties; the New York singer Lou Reed, and the English group Roxy Music, for example, were creating stunning tableaux both on and off stage. The relationship between the two was highlighted in an exhibition called 'Transformer' (1974) at the Kunstmuseum, Lucerne, including works by the artists Urs Lüthi, Katharina Sieverding and Luciano Castelli. 'Transformer art' also referred to the notion of androgyny resulting from the feminists' suggestion that traditional female and male roles could – at least in fashion – be equalized. So Lüthi, a short, roundish Zurich artist, impersonated his tall, thin, beautiful girlfriend Manon, with the aid of heavy make-up and sucked-in cheeks, in a series of posed performances in which she and he, by all appearances, were interchangeable. Ambivalence was, he said, the most significant creative aspect of his works, as seen in *Self-Portrait* (1973). Similarly, the Düsseldorf artists Sieverding and Klaus Mettig hoped, in *Motor-Kamera* (1973), to arrive at an 'interchange of identification' by acting out a series of domestic situations for which they were dressed and made up to look uncannily alike. In Lucerne, Castelli created exotic environments such as *Performance Solarium* (1975), in which he lay surrounded by paraphernalia from a transvestite's wardrobe, make-up box and photo album.

Another offshoot of living sculpture was less narcissistic: some artists explored the formal qualities of poses and gestures in a series of *tableaux vivants*. In Italy, Jannis Kounellis presented works which combined animate and inanimate sculpture: *Table* (1973) consisted of a table strewn with 137 fragments from an ancient Roman Apollo sculpture next to which sat a man,



137 Jannis Kounellis, *Table*, 1973

an Apollo mask held to his face. According to Kounellis, this and several other untitled 'frozen performances' – some of which included live horses – were a means of illustrating metaphorically the complexity of ideas and sensations represented in art throughout art history. He considered the Parthenon frieze as such a 'frozen performance'. Each sculpture or painting in the history of art, he said, contained 'the story of the loneliness of a single soul' and his tableaux attempted to analyse the nature of that 'singular vision'. The

138 Roman artist Luigi Ontani portrayed such 'visions' in a series of performances in which he personified figures from classical paintings; they included *San Sebastian* (1973) (after Guido Reni) and *Après J.L. David* (1974). Some of his 'reincarnations' were based on historical figures: on his first visit to New York, in 1974, he travelled in a costume recreated from drawings of Christopher Columbus.

139 Scott Burton's *Pair Behavior Tableaux* (1976) for two male performers, at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, was an hour-long performance composed of approximately eighty static poses held for a number of seconds each. Each pose demonstrated Burton's so-called body-language vocabulary – 'role establishment', 'appeasement', 'disengagement' etc. – and was followed by a blackout; viewed from a distance of twenty yards, the figures were deceptively sculpture-like. Also in 1976, at The Clocktower in New York, an American-based artist by the name of Colette lay naked in a

140 luxurious twenty-by-twenty-foot environment of crushed silk in *Real Dream*, a 'sleep tableau' lasting several hours.

138 Luigi Ontani, *Don Quixote*, 1974

139 Scott Burton, *Pair Behavior Tableaux*, 1976. Tableau no. 47 from a five-part performance composed of eighty silent *tableaux vivants*. First performed at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 24 February–4 April 1976

140 Colette, *Real Dream*, first performed at the Clocktower, New York, December 1975

